



EMPOWERING POSITIVE POST-SCHOOL TRANSITIONS:

The ABCs of 'College for all'

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

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i. Executive Summary

Background

Over my career, I have seen many vulnerable learners flourish in the well supported environments of small flexible learning providers. However, these learners often struggle to transition into further education or employment. Previous wellbeing barriers often resurface during the turbulent period of transition to the next step. In my Fellowship, I was interested to explore innovative strategies of working with disadvantaged learners regarding education pedagogies that engage disadvantaged students; engagement strategies that help to keep students in education and transitions/pathways support strategies that help students move on successfully into further education and/or employment.

The methodology for the Fellowship included carrying out visits to practice based education programs, visits to research based programs and attending the 2017 Harvard School of Education Project Zero Conference. These three different perspectives helped me to get a well-rounded overview of innovations and challenges facing the US education system regarding transitions for young people.

The Fellowship was conducted in April/May of 2017. Report writing, synthesis of findings and dissemination then occurred in the following six-month post-trip period. Having worked for over twenty years across a range of education settings spanning primary, secondary, post-secondary and specialist flexible learning settings, I have a wide range of experiences with the education sector. As my career has progressed, I have increasingly specialised on developing programs to reengage vulnerable young people into education. I am passionate about ensuring that all young people get a fair go in education, regardless of their background or

circumstances. I hold a Bachelor of Science, a Graduate Diploma of Education and a Master of Adolescent Health and Wellbeing. Additionally, I have completed by Certificate IV in Training and Assessing and have recently completed the Certificate III in Micro Business Operations.

Fellowship Learnings

1. Education Pedagogy

- » **Thinking outside the box** - Pedagogies developed through the Harvard School of Education Project Zero, such as Thinking Routines, challenge traditional teaching methodologies, moving the focus away from 'chalk and talk' and a testing focus to considering how to develop 'deep thinking'.
- » **Focusing on remedial teaching doesn't always have the desired affect** – Currently only 18% of students complete their course at Community College (similar to our TAFEs). The majority of students who don't complete failed to finish a compulsory 'remedial class' component of their course. As Community Colleges are one of the main destinations young disadvantaged people end up at, this is of great concern.
- » **Grit and other 'soft-skills'** – Soft skills and 'grit' were mentioned often as programs looked for ways to improve students' academic mind-sets increasing ability to overcome adversity in education. This has been shown to be particularly important for young people who are at-risk of dropping out of education.

2. Engagement Strategies

- » **The importance of partnerships** - Every visit I went on really emphasized the importance of **partnerships** in engaging and helping transitions for young people. These partnerships created the holistic supports needed to engage young people with education. Key examples of partnerships to enable success included partnerships between schools and colleges/universities (to enable research and simplify pathways for students); partnerships between schools and business/philanthropy (to facilitate funding for students from low SES backgrounds to attend college); and partnerships between external agencies and schools, including justice, legal aid and homelessness programs.

3. Transition Strategies

- » **The importance of high expectations** - disadvantaged young people should have high expectations when it comes to thinking about accessing college. The mantra of 'College for all' was very prevalent in my visits – and the understanding that this would be made a reality by smoothing the pathway for young people who would often be the first in their family to consider going to college.
- » **Identifying and overcoming barriers to college application** – this was an important step in making college application a reality. Major barriers identified by staff supporting students were family expectations; high costs to attend college; the long and often confusing college application process; and the culture at college once students got there.
- » **Whole of society approach** – it was notable that the whole of society took responsibility to enable students to get to college, including business and philanthropy. Charter Schools and Choice Schools received some portion of government funding and typically receive a top up from philanthropy. Some such schools targeted very low socioeconomic areas aiming to educate and pathway students to college who were considered to have been 'failed by the public education system'.

Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact

Personal Impact – I was struck on my visit to the United States by how localised, 'place based' responses had significant impacts. Having been personally involved with similar place based responses in Melbourne, I now feel I have an international point of reference for what I already felt was a good way to approach complex issues. This will impact my way of thinking when it comes to understanding barriers to education for young people in Melbourne, Victoria and Australia.

Professional Impact – since returning, this Fellowship has allowed me to present three times at significant Melbourne based conferences/forums. This has given me a wider professional exposure – particularly the opportunity to present to a room full of senior Department of Education and Training (DET) managers and staff at the DET Higher Education and Skills Group (HESG) All Staff Forum.

Sectoral Impact - within Victoria, I have played a role in the flexible learning and reengagement sector for the previous seven years. This Fellowship will strengthen my ability to add value to this sector that supports some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged young people in Victoria. Key projects that I am currently involved with, including evaluations and project work, have been informed by my findings as I am drawn to work that enables me to play a role in strengthening transitions for Victorian young people.

Considerations

Firstly, **pedagogy** needs to be adapted to the needs of the student, delivered through a variety of engaging teaching methodologies. Hands-on learning strategies access different parts of the brain and should be utilised often across all education sectors. Similarly, slowing down the delivery of content enables deeper learning to occur, leading to curiosity.

Secondly, **engagement** of students to make transitions more successful can be strengthened by strong partnerships. Program core components to empower

positive transitions included a commitment to the students' pathway; a clear financial commitment that was seen **as core business, not just an add on**; *expanding the viewpoint of the student* about what college really was like; *a research backed approach*; and *involving external partners*.

Thirdly, to impact on **transitions**, we need to raise aspirations for young people to continue study after school from early on, starting from the beginning of secondary school at the latest. By systematically raising aspirations that all young people can access further education should they wish too, young people will be empowered to make decisions that are right for them rather than being restricted by real or perceived barriers. Clear processes should be in place to assist students with further study applications. Innovation involving partners can enable pathway options to be resourced beyond the means of the school program.

Recommendations

Pedagogy:

- a. to champion that innovation and hands on learning strategies are used through all levels of teaching and learning – at school, TAFE and University;
- b. that educators should explore methods of teaching that create deep learning experiences and resist the urge to just 'teach to tests'.

Engagement:

- a. to raise aspirations for further education from early on by putting pathways at the centre of the conversation at school;
- b. to increase pathways information for young people at every level of school. Start early – from Year 7 onward;
- c. to streamline and clarify application processes for further education;

- d. to empower transitions by creating cross-sectoral staff that are accessible no matter which institution a student is in to support them with this application stage;
- e. to activate the social justice remit of business and philanthropy to play a more significant role in funding programs that support the transition of young people into further education or employment.

Transitions:

- a. to encourage schools to consider the transition of their student as part of their core business, thereby creating an ongoing transitions commitment;
- b. to consider ways for institutions to financially support students moving on;
- c. to understand the role of ongoing relationships and mentoring to empower successful transitions;
- d. to encourage greater links between higher education institutions and lower SES schools, enabling students to make the next step after finishing school;
- e. to promote the importance of partnerships within the community to enable young people from lower SES backgrounds to access further and higher education;
- f. to communicate to business and philanthropy the crucial role that they can and do play in the future of all Victorian young people.

1. Fellowship Background

1.1 Context

The aim of my Fellowship was to examine innovative ways of working with disadvantaged learners regarding:

- » *education pedagogies* that engage disadvantaged students
- » *engagement strategies* to keep them in education and
- » *transitions/pathways support strategies* into further education and/or employment.

During my career, I have worked in several settings with marginalized and disadvantaged learners. I have observed that they often flourish in the well supported environments of small, individual focused flexible learning providers where they receive high levels of assistance. However, these learners often struggle to transition into further education or employment. Previous wellbeing barriers to succeeding in education often resurface or new barriers establish themselves during the turbulent period of transition from one education setting to the next step.

In my Fellowship, I was interested in exploring practice and research from the US that connected the dots between engagement, pedagogies and transitions/pathways strategies to enable success after compulsory schooling has finished. My intention was to then bring this practice back to my workplace, to the networks of Flexible Learning Victoria and to the wider Victorian Education and Training sector.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology for achieving the Fellowship included:

1. **Visits to practice based education programs** - to learn first-hand from engagement, learning support, wellbeing and pathways strategies utilized to support disadvantaged young people.
2. **Visits to research based programs at universities** - to connect with academics that had a good understanding of transition strategies employed by schools, colleges and universities to support disadvantaged learners.
3. **A conference visit** - to explore innovative pedagogy at the 2017 Harvard School of Education Project Zero Perspectives: Making, Innovating, Learning Conference in Pittsburgh (see details at: <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/professional-development/events-institutes/project-zero-perspectives-making-innovating-learning#sthash.RH9fKRHM.dpuf>).

1.3 Period

This Fellowship was conducted in April/May of 2017. Report writing, synthesis of findings and dissemination then occurred in the following six-month post-trip period.

1.4 Fellow's Biography

Nick Johns is the Director of Johns Education Consulting. He is an educator who is passionate about ensuring that all young people get a fair go with schooling. For twenty years his career has focused on children and young people who are marginalised and disadvantaged. Nick has worked across a range of education settings in Melbourne and London spanning primary, secondary, post-secondary and specialist flexible learning settings. Since 2010 Nick worked to develop, manage and lead two not-for-profit Senior Secondary education programs at St Kilda Youth Service and Melbourne City Mission. Both programs worked with the most disadvantaged young people in our society, helping students to gain their Year 12 qualification and overcome significant wellbeing barriers.

In 2016/17 Nick held the role of Project Manager, Flexible Learning Victoria. This important project was responsible for networking small flexible learning programs across the state of Victoria, offering support through advocacy, professional development brokerage and creating networking opportunities. Nick has authored two publications – “Flexible and Alternative Education: Hearing the Voices of Young People” (2014) and “A Successful Journey: Defining the measures of success for young people in flexible learning programs” (2017). Nick is currently working as an education consultant focusing on evaluation, training and capacity building for the education and community services sector. Nick holds a Bachelor of Science, a Graduate Diploma of Education and a Master of Adolescent Health and Wellbeing. Additionally, he has completed the Certificate IV in Training and Assessing and the Certificate III in Micro Business Operations.

1.5 Abbreviations / Acronyms / Definitions

BATA	Boston Adult Technical Academy
BGKLLN	Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network
CCA	Community Colleges Australia
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training
EAL	English as an Additional Language
HESG	Higher Education Skills Group
HCZ	Harlem Children's Zone
KIPPLA	Knowledge is Power Program Los Angeles
LA	Los Angeles
MIPs	Managed Individual Pathways
NY	New York
SES	Socio-economic Status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education

UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
US	United States
VALA	Victorian Applied Learning Association
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YP	Young People

1.6 Australian Context

Statistics show there is a high need for flexible and adaptable approaches to engage and support disadvantaged learners – both in regard to staying engaged in learning and in transitioning after compulsory education. The Council of Australian Governments set targets for 90% of young people to complete Year 12 or equivalent by 2015 (COAG, 2009). This goal was recently extended out to 2020, as it had not been met (COAG, 2016). Legislation now requires Australian young people to complete schooling until Year 10 and participate in schooling, training or employment until aged 17 (DEEWR, 2011). The VET sector plays an important role in both of these goals.

The Government Response national VET sector reform *Skills and Jobs in the Education State* (DET, 2015) outlines three overarching objectives for the sector - that VET should:

1. Deliver quality training that meets current and future industry needs;
2. Grow employment and further education outcomes; and
3. **Promote equity and address disadvantage (my emphasis)**

From January 2017, Victoria's training and TAFE system has been overhauled under the Skills First initiative. According to the Skills First website (State Government of Victoria, 2017a), the new approach to training aimed to both set a high benchmark for training quality, and to support courses most likely to lead to employment. This new approach has a strong focus on reducing disadvantage.

There is an acknowledgement under Skills First that, at times, people need some extra support and assistance to get back on the road to success (State Government of Victoria, 2017a). Young people in particular may need a helping hand to ensure positive outcomes. Initiatives such as the **Reconnect** program help TAFEs and Learn Locals to provide support for early school leavers aged 15-24 years, long-term unemployed and disadvantaged students. Reconnect enables providers to deliver wrap-around services, such as extra literacy and numeracy, health and accommodation support.

Every year in Victoria almost 50,000 15-19 year olds are not engaged full time in education, training or employment (DEECD, 2014). *The Reconnect: Engagement and Learning Support* was established in response to a significant recent decline in the number of young early school leavers enrolling in vocational education and training programs, and in foundation skills in particular (State Government of Victoria, 2017b). According to the Victorian Training Market Report 2015 (DET, 2016), there was a 34% reduction from 2010-2015 in enrolments in government-subsidised accredited training at Certificate II and above by students aged 15-19 years without at least Year 12 or a Certificate II and not at school. This was most notable at Certificate II level, with a 56% drop. In addition, over 10,000 young people in Years 9-11 are leaving school and training every year, with a further 6000 disengaging within 12 months of transferring to the VET system (Cook, 2014). These statistics demonstrate a critical need to strengthen the transition between compulsory schooling and next steps in regard to education.

The VET reforms are part of the wider Education State initiative. Under the Education State target of 'Breaking the Link', the Education State "...aims to reduce the impact of disadvantage on student outcomes, to ensure more students develop the skills, knowledge and attributes they need to build healthy, happy and prosperous lives" (State Government of Victoria, 2017c). By 2025, it aims to achieve the following:

- » Fifty per cent fewer students will leave education early (between Years 9 and 12).
- » A fifteen per cent reduction in the gap in average achievement between disadvantage and other students in Year 5 and Year 9 reading.

It is well recognised that academic success alone does not guarantee a successful post school transition (Crump and Slee, 2015). In the report 'A Successful Journey: Defining the measures of success for young people in flexible learning programs', one of the key barriers identified to staying engaged with education is poor wellbeing (Johns and Parker, 2017). It recommends a strong focus on holistic, wellbeing support to enable young people to stay in education. Encouragingly there have been recent key Education State initiatives aimed at helping disadvantaged young people, including:

- » **LOOKOUT Centres** – with a focus on lifting educational outcomes for children and young people in care, these multidisciplinary centres support schools to monitor and evaluate educational progress of children and young people in care.
- » **Navigator** - providing intensive case management support to disengaged learners, aged 12 to 17 years old, this community agency delivered program actively works with young people and their support networks to return them to education.

Along with **Reconnect** these two programs aim to significantly increase engagement and retention of disadvantaged students in education through to completion of secondary school.

Finally, the nature of the workplace is changing. Many of the 'enterprise' skills needed by young people in a rapidly evolving employment market such as high-level critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork, are not currently the focus of schooling, meaning that a positive school experience may not translate to gaining secure employment (AlphaBeta, 2016). Currently it now takes an incredible **4.7 years** from when a young person leaves full time education to when they enter full time employment - in 1986, this was one year (Pope and Mutch, 2015). This shows the huge shifts in the employment landscape that have occurred in one generation. With all this change, it is crucial for young people to be well prepared for their transition after compulsory schooling as old ways of thinking of 'get a good education, get a good job' simply aren't true anymore – it is not this linear.

2. Identifying the Skills Enhancement and Knowledge Acquisition Areas

There were several intended outcomes for the education and training sector from my Fellowship. By connecting with programs, meeting with researchers and attending a conference I intended to explore the following areas:

2.1 Area 1 - Teaching and Learning Pedagogies for Disadvantaged Learners

The first part of my Fellowship targeted exploring hands on, applied pedagogies that could be translated to the Australian context. I learned about **innovative pedagogies aimed at engaging the whole person** including teaching practices for highly disadvantaged populations (such as homeless young people in Los Angeles). I also investigated Harvard School of Education Project Zero, considering applicability of unique pedagogies developed such as Multiple Intelligences, Thinking Routines and the Maker movement to the education sector in Victoria.

2.2 Area 2 - Engagement Strategies for Disadvantaged Learners

The second part of my Fellowship focused on best practice in **place-based outreach and engagement for disadvantaged learners**, particularly those in the homelessness, justice and foster care sector. I visited a program in Los Angeles that works with young people experiencing homelessness (over two-thirds of the 40,000 rough sleeping homeless population in the US live in California).

In Chicago, I visited justice programs working with young people that operate diversionary programs for gang related violence (in 2016, this violence led to over 700 deaths - more than LA and NY combined). These programs also support young people leaving care – tragically, a young person leaving foster care in Illinois has a 60% chance of either being in jail or dead one year after leaving school.

2.3 Area 3 - Pathways/Transitions Strategies for Disadvantaged Learners

The third part of my Fellowship focused on best practice in supporting **pathways for learners from low SES backgrounds**. Statistically we know that learners from low-SES backgrounds struggle to pathway to further and higher education. Several education programs in America have developed focused place-based strategies for assisting with transitions for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as KIPPLA and Harlem Children's Zone. These programs heavily promote a 'to and through College' message, supporting high expectations for young people who often were aiming to be the first in their family to attend college.

2.4 Actions

The actions resulting from these visits were to:

1. Document *education pedagogies* used to engage disadvantaged learners as described at five program delivery visits and Harvard School of Education Project Zero Perspectives: Making, Innovating, Learning Conference.
2. Document *engagement strategies* for disadvantaged learners with a key focus on homelessness, juvenile justice diversionary programs and foster care.
3. Document *pathway and transition strategies* for disadvantaged learners enabling them to reach and thrive at college or to pursue employment opportunities.

3. Fellowship Learnings

3.1 Introduction

My visit to the USA lasted from 18th April – 24th May 2017. During this time, I visited five American cities – Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh and New York. A summary of the locations, people visited and focus of visit/summary of discussions can be found in Appendix 1. Key themes emerged from these visits, which are discussed below under the three focus Skills Enhancement and Knowledge Acquisition Areas of my visit.

3.2 Key Themes/Learnings

3.2.1 Education Pedagogy

Thinking outside the box

The two-day Harvard Project Zero Conference focused on a range of innovative pedagogies that have been developed over decades at the Project Zero Centre. Day one was held at Quaker Valley School. Day two was held at the amazing University of Pittsburgh Cathedral of Learning and the Carnegie Museum of Art and Natural History. These link into the current Maker Movement in education in the USA, where schools are making a conscious effort to get young people using their hands to make things, create art, build and deconstruct objects and interact with physical mediums. This is a response to the testing culture, which has many students spending the majority of their school day focussed on content, rather than engaged in 'deep learning'.



Image 1: Project Zero Conference 'Welcome Banner', Quaker Valley School



Image 2: Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh

Some examples of ways to think and learn outside the box included the following:

1. **Hacking the Mind** – the keynote address focused on how to 'hack the mind' to get it to remember key facts. An example given was by leaving a shoe by the front door, the speaker was reminded to get milk! There was no connection between the shoe and milk except that, to his mind, he knew the significance of this object and what it represented. He extended this concept to discuss how we can get students to make links between concepts to improve learning.
2. **Thinking Routines** – for many years Project Zero has been developing Thinking Routines. Some of these covered at the conference included:
 - » **See, Think, Wonder** – this routine involves helping young people to slow down to See a particular thing, such as a piece of art, and writing initial observations; to then Think about the reason it was painted that way, or why it centres on that subject (e.g. why a painter used thick brush strokes to represent swaying trees); and then to Wonder more deeply about what other questions they might have about it (such as what the painting might represent more widely, such as the idea of freedom).
 - » **Parts, Purposes, Complexities** – this routine involves looking at the parts of an object (such as an old camera), identifying the purposes of every part and then thinking about the complexities (or Puzzles) of how that part works with the other parts. Again, this routine is designed to get students to slow down, look carefully at an object, reflect on it, physically take it apart (using a screwdriver or similar) and analyse it piece by piece. This routine creates a sense of wonder at the complexity of items that we usually take for granted.

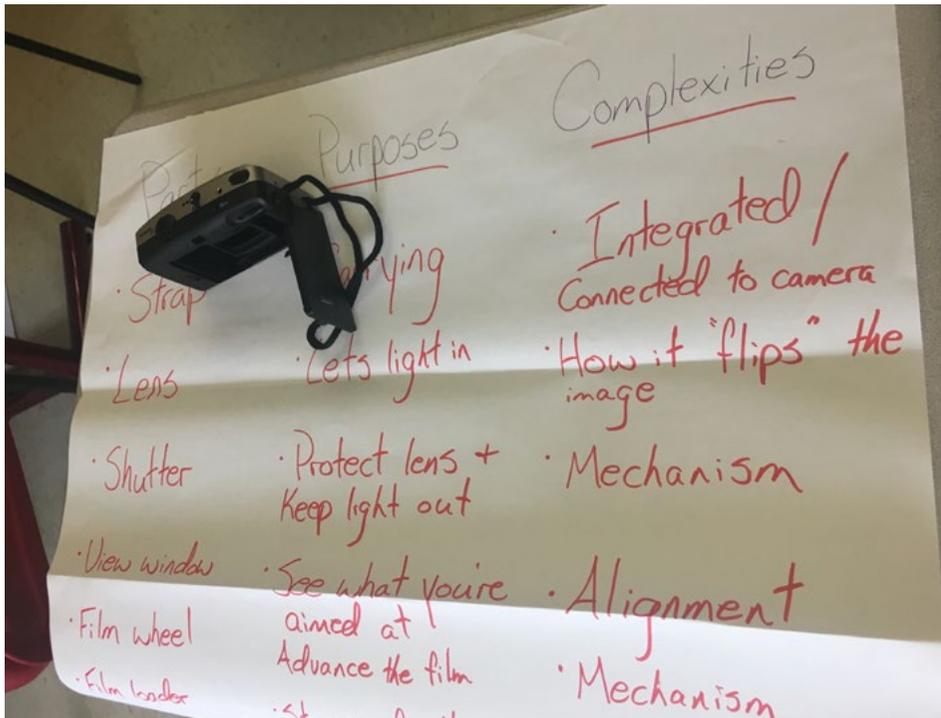


Image 3: Parts, Purposes and Complexities

In addition, these routines were linked to other learning pedagogies, such as the importance of having a growth mind-set. These pedagogies have high relevance to reengagement work as they are intentional about both engaging students physically and mentally, and also getting them to slow down and enjoy learning again, rather than just trying to 'stuff as much information' into their heads as possible by focusing on content (and in particular often content for tests).

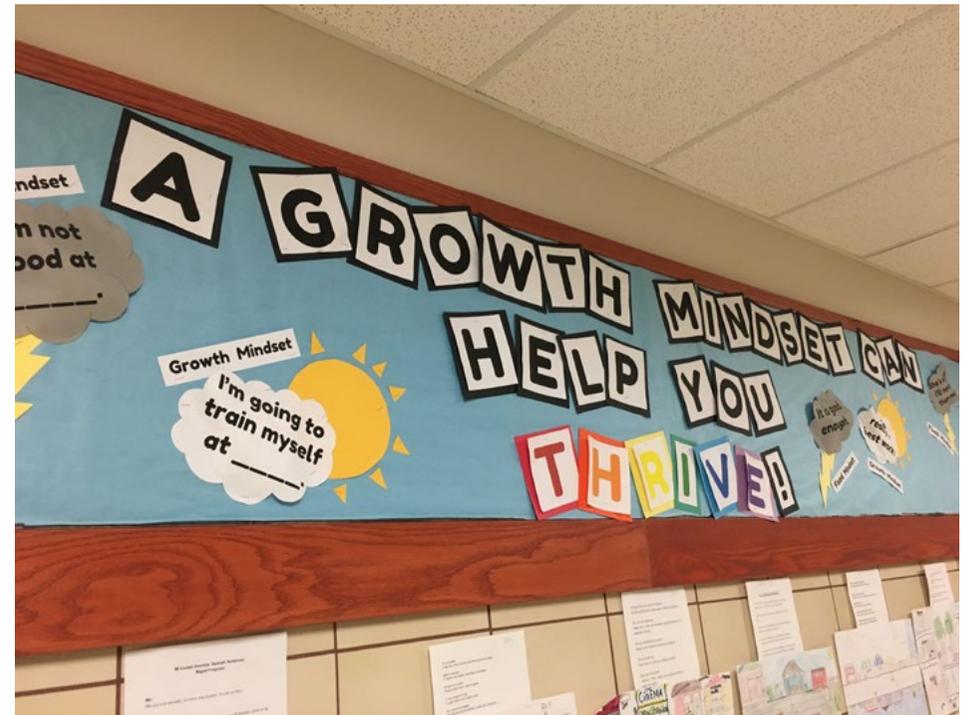


Image 4: Growth mindset

Focussing on remedial teaching doesn't always have the desired affect

The statistic that most shocked and stuck with me from the whole Fellowship was how low Community College completion rates are. According to Elisabeth Barnett (Senior Research Associate, Columbia University College Research Centre) the Community College system, which in some ways the closest equivalent to our TAFE system, only has around 18% completion. As these are one of the main pathway education destinations that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds end up at, this is of great concern.



Image 5: Students graduating at Columbia

According to different people that I spoke to there were some key reasons for this reality:

1. Community Colleges have a key focus on remedial teaching – this slows down the rate of moving through a qualification.
2. Certain units such as maths were needed to pass a course, and non-completion of these would typically stop a student from completing.
3. The sorts of students who ended up going to Community College typically had lower academic and study skills than those attending college (or university as

we would call it). This was a barrier to learning and compounded upon entry if not addressed.

4. Until recently there was no minimum length of time that you could complete the courses in, hence students would drag out progress through the course, leading to non-completion.

Students seemingly needed better-guided pathways into college, with better information about what the courses would involve once they were there. Some areas of the States were now moving towards shaping the way that Community College courses were offered, giving less electives and more structure. The goal of this was to encourage students to move through the courses in a more linear fashion as the lack of structure was identified as a key barrier to completion.

Grit and other 'soft-skills'

It's not just about the way that we teach – it's also about the soft skills that we instil in our students. One of the key concepts talked about at a few settings I visited was 'Grit' and how to promote the necessary grit for students to persist in their studies. This fits with a current thinking in American education around how to improve students' academic mind-sets so that they can overcome adversity in schooling and continue on. This has been shown to be particularly important for young people who are at-risk of dropping out of education.

This concept of Grit was recently popularised by a TED Talk by Angela Duckworth (2015), 'Grit: the power of passion and perseverance'. This has been viewed over 12 million times. This discusses the concept that IQ is not the most important factor in having a successful future, but rather grit is. She defines grit as passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. An important co-concept is having a 'growth mind-set' – the belief that ability to learn is not fixed. In other words, for students who have failed, they do not believe that they will always fail, or fail next time.

Programs visited discussed a range of online resources created to develop these skills and to explicitly teach other non-academic skills. It was seen that it was often these non-academic skills that were lacking in students and causing them to stumble on their pathway through to college and beyond.

3.2.2 Engagement Strategies

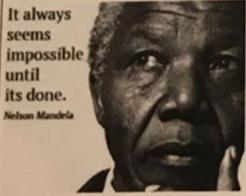
The importance of partnerships

Every visit I went on really emphasized the importance of **partnerships** in engaging young people in the education process and creating successful transitions for young people. These partnerships created the holistic supports needed to engage young people with education. Below are several of these partnerships examples.

School to College – institutions such as BATA (Boston Adult Technical Academy) had actively pursued relationships with local colleges to enable young people to attend these colleges for one subject. By doing this, they both broke down misconceptions and fears about attending such a college and also created potential future pathways into college. When at BATA I met one young lady who was an undocumented immigrant. She was very bright and was studying a subject at the college, opening doors for her into the future. BATA was also helping her with understanding her options around her immigration status. BATA had a range of bilingual posters and supports in place as demonstrated by the photos below.



Image 6: BATA exterior

QUE ESPERAMOS DE BATA	
	<p>Tengamos Ánimo</p> <p><i>Toda la comunidad de BATA promueve el buen ánimo a través de objetivos altos para nosotros y los demás. Nosotros ayudamos a nuestra comunidad a tener éxito cuando nos enfrentamos con la adversidad.</i></p>
	<p>Seamos Responsables</p> <p><i>Todos hemos tomado decisiones, buenas y malas. Tenemos que aceptar las decisiones y continuar hacia delante para aprovechar toda oportunidad de aprender.</i></p>
	<p>Mostremos Respeto</p> <p><i>Mostramos respeto cuando somos limpios y ordenados y cuando usamos lenguaje y conducta apropiados para crear un ambiente productivo y de aprendizaje.</i></p>
	<p>Actuemos con Integridad</p> <p><i>Podemos mostrarle a nuestra comunidad quiénes somos a través de nuestro trabajo honesto, justo, y sin críticas. Nuestro ambiente de estudio honra la reflexión propia y la comunicación abierta sobre nuestras necesidades.</i></p>
	<p>Seamos Líderes</p> <p><i>Tomemos iniciativa para liderar nuestros compañeros en lo social y lo académico. Seamos un modelo de conducta y lideremos con acciones y no sólo con palabras.</i></p>

Spanish 2015-16

Image 7: BATA Spanish poster



Image 8: BATA welcome poster

College to School – many colleges actively reached out to partner with schools to enable pathways for young people. This included organising experience days, providing scholarships, taking part in activities to raise the aspirations of young people, and a range of other activities to help promote the concept of ‘College for all’. This was a concept that I heard discussed very often and was a key narrative within the American education system – that ensuring fair and equitable access to college for minority, underprivileged and underrepresented community sectors was critical.

Justice Diversionary Programs – I visited two diversionary programs that worked specifically to keep young people out of the justice system and to reconnect them

with education. These programs partnered with other community agencies and also had an active presence in the large local secondary schools. One program that I visited in Evanston, Chicago ran dialogue sessions between Evanston Police and, as the lawyer called them, 'gang bangers' to create understanding and humanise both groups. This program also worked to expunge criminal records for young people, so as to enable pathways back into education and employment. Programs such as these were designed to reduce tensions within their community. Another program visited had extensive summer programs in recognition of the difficulty that this long period away from school presented for many young people.



Image 9: City of Evanston Youth and Young Adult Division

Homelessness/ Housing Programs – in certain cities (such as Los Angeles) homelessness was a key interrupter for positive education outcomes. One program (School on Wheels) in the infamous Skid Row area of Los Angeles worked with young people and their families to ensure that any material barriers to these young people attending school were addressed, such as not having books, pencils etc. This program also offered one-on-one tutoring across the whole of California to children experiencing homelessness.

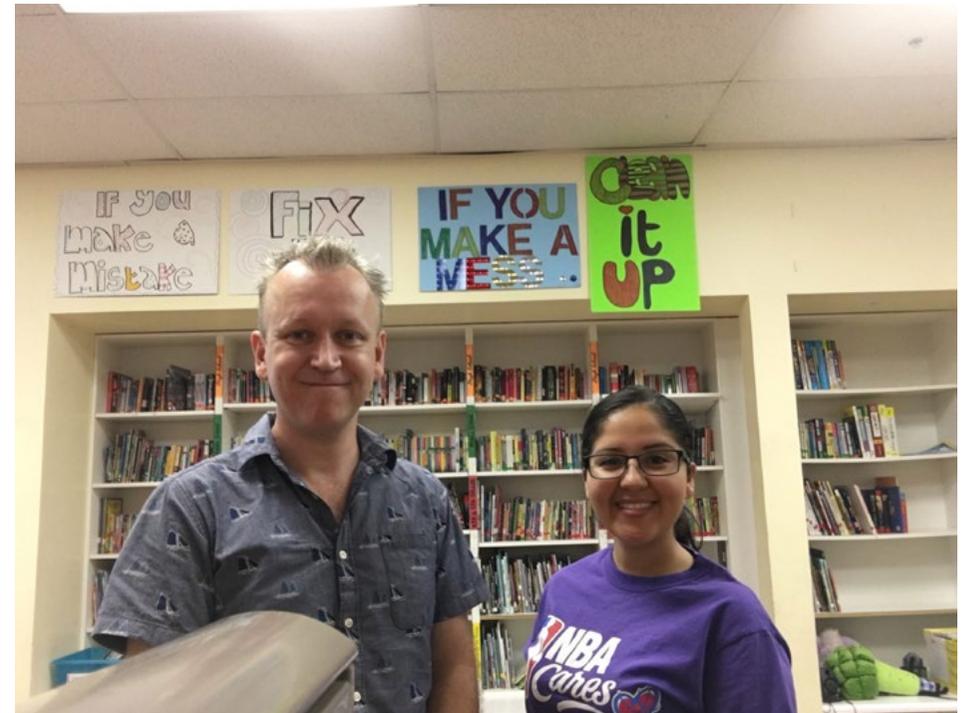


Image 10: School on Wheels

Legal Aid – at several locations programs supported undocumented immigrants by connecting these students to free legal aid. At one large school (the Robert F Kennedy School) in Koreatown, Los Angeles, they even had lawyers offering such

services free of charge at the school. The legal status of students was obviously a key issue in certain communities and one that casted great uncertainty over their future. These partnerships between legal services and schools also facilitated pathways onto college by giving information to the young people about their legal rights for further education. Such pathways were complicated by legislation passed by the Obama administration allowing the children of immigrants born in America to continue their studies. This had been passed in certain states (such as California) but not in others and was now under threat due to the Trump administration.

Research Institutions to School – all three Universities that I visited (UCLA, Harvard and Columbia) actively partnered with schools or school districts to create opportunities for underprivileged young people. UCLA had created UCLA Community School in Koreatown, LA. The UCLA School of Education gave extensive support to the school by facilitating action research projects, placement of student teachers and pathways to college. In addition, the Vice Chancellor of the University had made a key philanthropic commitment, resulting in millions of dollars being donated to the school. Resultantly, in the 10 or so years that the University had partnered with this school, its college enrolment rate had more than doubled from approximately 35% to over 95% intention to enrol. In 2015, of these about 75% did enrol and 80% of those 'persisted' to sophomore year. UCLA had since partnered with other schools in South LA, another deprived area of LA. This ongoing commitment to lower socio-economic sections of Los Angeles had begun after the Rodney King incident, when the school decided that students couldn't just go to Beverly Hills High (close to the main UCLA campus) as a student teacher but instead would learn in some of the neediest areas of LA.



Image 11: University of California, Los Angeles

Harvard University Education Redesign Lab, on the other hand, partnered with school districts and mayors of several cities, to invest in out of school opportunities for students, and Columbia University partnered with a number of schools in Harlem to offer enrichment experiences. These partnerships allowed a flow of resources and research-based projects to the schools, and provided the Universities with the opportunity for school based research and student placements.

3.2.3 Transition Strategies

The importance of high expectations

The importance of high expectations for disadvantaged young people to be able to access and go to college came through time and time again. Many programs visited prioritised young people believing that they COULD go to College should they wish – that this was not beyond their reach. Colleges played a major role in framing and supporting these high expectation and opportunities for young people who would not usually reach college. They did this by providing opportunities to visit campuses, offering scholarships and financial aid, arranging mentoring opportunities and actively enabling underrepresented student population groups to enrol and attend their college. One college advisor described more exclusive colleges actually being more pro-active than the local state colleges in recruiting underrepresented young people, as they often had the resources to cast their net wide for such students. They also had the financial resources to support these young people once enrolled.

The mantra of 'College for all' was very prevalent. Resultantly an interesting conversation became about 'What if a young person doesn't want to go to College but has attended a school where this is messaged strongly from early on?' Different programs I visited described trying to balance out the odds by pushing this message.

Identifying and overcoming barriers to college application

Some of the major barriers that were identified by staff that worked to enable college access were:

Family expectations – often a student's family actually wanted them to stay at home and contribute to the family income. This was particularly the case when a student from a lower socio-economic background was going away from the home to study, as is common in America. A solution that was identified for this was to work with families over long period of time, building up realistic understanding of

what going to college would actually look like for their son or daughter (who would often be the first in their family to attend college).

High costs – in the USA, there are high costs associated with both study at college and also living away from home. According to College Data (2017), typical yearly costs to attend college are:

- » \$33,480 at private colleges,
- » \$9,650 for state residents at public colleges, and
- » \$24,930 for out-of-state residents attending public universities.

Key solutions suggested were scholarships and to connect the young person to bursaries, especially for minority groups from different private colleges. Community College costs were lower at between \$3000- \$5000 per year, however even this was out of reach for many aspiring college students.

Long college application process - this had apparently improved with a common America-wide application form recently introduced, however it was still a daunting process. This was particularly true for those who struggled with English literacy. One solution identified was to deliver extensive preparation for the college application process, starting as early as Junior Year or Year 9 (e.g. writing mock application letters).

Culture at college - often the culture when young people went to college was so different to what they were used to; it could be overwhelming for them to settle into. Some colleges were known to be very 'preppy' (that is, culturally like the preparatory schools from the more prestigious parts of America) and, in essence, mainly white. This was confronting for students from minorities, who might be the only minority student in their class/dorm etc.



Image 12 (top): Harlem Children's Zone logo

Image 13 (right): Harlem Children's Zone



Solutions identified for this were pre-college visits (to prepare for the culture) and the importance of 'to and through college' programs where young people are supported right through college, not just to get in in the first place. Mentors connected with the students' school would track with the young people during their time at college. At Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), if students dropped out of college, they could go back and reconnect with their old HCZ community before either having another go at college or receiving assistance to get employment. This was primarily facilitated through the HCZ College Success Office. Ex-students were also offered internships to gain experience after school had finished.

Whole of society approach (including business and philanthropy)

Something that came up constantly was the impact of philanthropy and private 'investors' in education. This was particularly evident in discussions about Charter Schools – schools that run to a 'Charter' that receive some portion of

government funding and typically receive a top up from philanthropy. These were clearly divisive. I visited two such schools – KIPPLA and Harlem Children's Zone. Both worked in very low socioeconomic areas aiming to educate and pathway to college students who were considered to have been failed by the public education system. Both had impressive results in getting students 'to and through college'. Nonetheless, critics of such schools that I spoke with stated that they weren't unionised, could pay teachers what they wanted, could exclude students when they wanted and were not held to the same standards as other public schools.



Image 14: KIPPLA

Other examples discussed were Silicon Valley charter schools designed to pathway students into the tech world and start-ups, funded by the like of Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs' wife. These institutions were described as places of innovation, where thinking outside the box could thrive, however this counterbalanced with perceived lack of accountability. It was clear that, for better or worse, philanthropy

and business played a far more significant role in the education landscape in the States than it does currently here in Australia.

It was notable that the whole of society was invested in the education system in America – both literally and figuratively. This struck me as different to Australia where there is an expectation that government will primarily lead the way with education policy, resourcing and implementation.

3.3 Summary

In summary, as with any education system, the challenges facing the American education system were many and varied. My overall impression was that it is a more divided education system than the Australian system with real issues of inequality. Areas of poverty were being further divided by the influx of charter and choice schools –whilst some of these options were clearly innovative and working hard to help lower SES students, it seemed a worrying trend that many parts of society felt that to ensure a good education for young people, they had to take control of education away from the government. This system also seemed open to abuse, with reduced accountability potentially resulting in lower quality education and transition options for young people.

Persistence is also a critical issue. Whilst many American students (approximately 70%) will study at a 4-year college, less than 2/3rd will graduate, with the primary reason for drop out being unable to balance school, jobs and family (College Atlas, 2017). Many students dropping out were from low SES backgrounds, compounding financial challenges of staying enrolled. One result of this inequality of opportunity was the pockets of innovation that have sprung up to address this. I believe that the Australian education system has much to learn from these localised, place based solutions.

4. Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact

4.1 Personal Impact

This Fellowship greatly increased my understanding of the range of transition strategies in the United States. One of the most interesting things was the extent to which the size and population of America apparently played a role. As each state was so different in the way that their education system worked, there were a wide range of responses to similar challenges. This 'place based' approach struck me as sensible and scalable – taking into account the needs of the local community first and foremost, and then finding an appropriate framework to apply to solve the issue.

One idea that I really liked was that of mentoring young people over the long term – the 'to and through college' concept. Whilst this might seem very difficult to implement with questions such as how to fund it, how to implement it, how to connect with students even when they are further afield (e.g. out of state), many programs I visited had found ways to address these challenges.

One other thing that was interesting on my visit was that certain visits that I was really looking forward to were a bit underwhelming whereas others were surprisingly impactful. This reminded me to look for unexpected 'gems' of practice in places that might not have the full weight of a 'big name program' but still had exceptional, innovative practice.

Finally, I greatly appreciated the opportunity to carry out this Fellowship with my family with me. The ability to come home after a visit and talk it through with my wife was an important part of being able to process the significance of each visit, particularly as she works in the same field as me. For me, an important

benchmark of practice is "What services/programs would I want my children to have?". Having my children with me was a constant reminder of how important it is for the Australian education system to create positive transition experiences for every young person.

4.2 Professional Impact

Professionally, this Fellowship has already had a significant impact on me. The Project Zero tools that I became more familiar with will become part of my toolkit when teaching and training. The opportunities to speak at Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA) and Community Colleges Australia (CCA) annual conferences was an excellent opportunity to share my learnings from the Fellowship and to connect with a wide range of professionals in the field. The subsequent opportunity to speak at the August DET HESG forum was an excellent opportunity to share learnings and to increase my professional exposure to some of the most senior managers and policy makers within the Department of Education and Training.

The process of dissemination through report writing has been a very positive one as it has enabled me to reflect on my professional journey. It has impacted on my thinking about the way that young people transition from school in Australia since my return. This has been particularly helpful as I have gone through the process of setting up an education consultancy. I have considered the significance of transitions for young people within the Victorian education sector to a greater extent which has lead me to pursue work relating to transitions into and out of secondary education.

Since returning I have been involved with delivering On Track for a Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), following up the transition post Year 12 of students in this area. This has been a direct application of my thinking into this space. In addition, I have been involved with an evaluation of an innovative school model. One aspect considered in this evaluation is looking at successful transitions as a key measurable outcome for the school. Again, I have been able to directly apply my learnings to this project. One other piece of work I am involved with entails exploring what successful transitions look like from Primary to Secondary school. I facilitated a regional DET Transition Community of Practice day. Lastly, in a recent project that I have been undertaking with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has seen me researching resources for entrepreneurship. In this space, I have also been able to apply the concepts learned both around practical, hands-on learning (to suit the needs of EAL students) and the support needed by a marginalised cohort to successfully transition to a new venture – in this case, a new business.

4.3 Sectoral Impact

Within Victoria, I have played a role in the flexible learning and reengagement sector for the previous seven years. This Fellowship will strengthen my ability to add value to this sector that supports some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged young people in Victoria. Positive transitions are arguably even more important for this cohort who otherwise may well end up out of education and employment for several years post-compulsory education. Future work in the sector that I will carry out will be informed by what I have learnt through my Fellowship.

4.3.1 Dissemination

Since returning from the Fellowship I have spoken at three conferences/forums. At each of these I have had the opportunity to both present on the Fellowship and also acknowledge the support provided by the DET HESG and the International Specialised Skills Institute.

1. Victorian Applied Learning Association Annual Conference – *Partnership in action: Applied Learning at its best! June 23rd, 2017.*

At this conference, I presented on the Harvard School of Education Project Zero Conference in a workshop titled 'Making, Innovating, Learning: Lessons from Harvard's Project Zero Conference'. During this presentation, I discussed the types of Thinking Routines that can help teachers to engage their learners in deep thinking. For conference slides see <http://vala.asn.au/2017conference/docs/C4-Lessons-from-Harvards-Project-Zero-conference.pdf>

2. Community Colleges Australia Annual Conference – *Community Education: Investing in our Future. July 25th – 27th, 2017.*

At this conference, I presented a workshop titled 'Empowering Positive Post-School Transitions: A US Perspective'. During this presentation, I gave an overview of four things that my Fellowship illuminated that make a difference in aiding successful transitions for disadvantaged young people:

- » Raising aspirations
- » Overcoming college application barriers
- » Partnerships that enable transition
- » Whole of society approach

For conference slides see <https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CCA-pres-Nick-Johns.pdf>

3. DET Higher Education Skills Group (HESG) All Staff Forum – August 30th, 2017.

The 'DET HESG All Staff Forum' is presented monthly for staff and manager within the HESG section of the Department of Education and Training. At this forum, I presented on the topic of 'Empowering Positive Post-School Transitions: A US Perspective'. After the presentation, I had the opportunity to speak with several senior DET managers about key topics relating to transitions.

In addition to these presentations, I have carried out dissemination through professional interactions that I have had since returning – both at other conferences that I have presented at (such as the Community Schools and Alternative Settings Biannual Conference) and in general conversation.

5. Recommendations and Considerations

5.1 Teaching and Learning Pedagogy

Considerations:

Curriculum needs to be adapted to the needs of the student. This includes ensuring that there are a variety of engaging teaching methodologies to ensure that students stay connected with education. Hands on, applied learning strategies access different parts of the brain and should be utilised often across all education sectors. The concept of slowing down to engage the student enables deeper learning to occur.

The education system should ensure that teaching does not only focus on content testing or competencies required, but also accesses the parts of the brain encourage curiosity. This sense of curiosity leads to deeper learning, helping information to 'stick'. Hands-on methodologies will also ideally make learning more enjoyable, helping students to feel more deeply engaged with the education process.

Recommendations:

- a. Champion that innovation and hands on learning strategies are used through all levels of teaching and learning – at school, TAFE and University.
- b. Educators should explore methods of teaching that create deep learning experiences and resist the urge to just 'teach to tests'. This is particularly important in an age of standardised testing as the key measure of progress - not just for students but also for professionals and schools.

5.2 Engagement Strategies

Considerations:

Engaging students fully in the whole education process is critical if we are to make transitions more successful. Seeing the influence of successful partnerships on turning around the college going and persistence statistics was perhaps the most impactful experience of my trip. Seeing programs such as the UCLA Community School, Harlem Children's Zone and KIPPLA double the rates of college going students in pockets of their community with high poverty was very impressive. They all used different strategies to reach this goal however there were certain core components that were the same:

- » *Commitment to the students' pathway* – schools demonstrated that they would stick with their students to and through college.
- » *Financial commitment* – each institution committed financially to students getting to and succeeding in college. **This was core business, not just an add on.** A financial commitment demonstrated to students the possibility that college was indeed accessible for them, regardless of their background.
- » *Expanding the viewpoint of the student* - through experiential learning opportunities, such as going on 'field trips' to colleges across the States, students gained an insight into what it might actually be like to go to college, thereby reducing fears about this.
- » *Research backed approach* – some institutions strongly supported research in this area by linking higher education providers with the schools.
- » *Involving external partners* – these included business, philanthropy, community

services (such as legal aid) and local government to enable these pathways. Organisations were determined to leverage off whatever supports were available to achieve their goals of increasing college-going rates.

Recommendations:

- a. Encourage schools and flexible learning programs to consider the transition of their student as part of their core business, thereby creating an ongoing commitment to making this happen. This should go beyond the current tools of MIPS and On Track, which track pathways but could be significantly expanded to have more impact.
- b. Consider ways for institutions to financially support students moving on.
- c. Understand the role of ongoing relationships and mentoring to empower successful transitions.
- d. Encourage greater links between higher education institutions and lower SES schools, enabling students to make the next step after finishing school. This could include both research focused and student visit focused approaches.
- e. Promote the importance of partnerships within the community to enable young people from lower SES backgrounds to access further and higher education.
- f. Communicate to business and philanthropy the crucial role that they can and do play in the future of all Victorian young people. Many education institutions seem somewhat impenetrable; as closed systems to outsiders. We need to create innovate ways for these sectors (and other sectors of the community) to connect with education institutions.

5.3 Pathways and Transition Strategies

Considerations:

There were key themes that emerged regarding best practice to enable pathways and create positive transitions for young people. When we are raising aspirations for young people to continue study after school, it was clear that we need to start from early on. Every program that had made a significant impact on college going rates started this work with students from the beginning of secondary school – and some from the start of primary school.

Regarding the application stage of moving forwards into further or higher education, there should be clear processes in place to ensure that students are aware of how to complete these applications. Having worked with many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, I have often experienced a state of confusion from students about how to do this. Young people in a traditional school typically have access to a careers counsellor or similar to guide them through this process. However, for young people who are either not in school or whose lives are very chaotic, this support can be hard to access.

Innovation involving partners enables pathway options to be funded and resourced beyond the means of the school or education program. As a system, we should tap into the potential for business and philanthropy to play an active role in enabling these pathways within their social justice remit.

The importance of raising aspirations cannot be overstated. By systematically raising aspirations and expectations that all young people can access further and higher education should they wish too, young people will be empowered to make decisions that are right for them rather than being restricted by real or perceived barriers.

Recommendations:

- a. Raise aspirations for further education from early on by putting pathways at the centre of the conversation at school.
- b. Increase pathways information for young people at every level of school. Start early – from Year 7 onwards.
- c. Streamline and clarify application processes for further education.
- d. Empower transitions by creating cross-sectoral staff that are accessible no matter which institution a student is in to support them with this application stage.
- e. Activate the social justice remit of business and philanthropy to play a more significant role in funding programs that support the transition of young people into further education or employment.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge all of the people and organisations visited on my Fellowship. These are listed in full detail in Appendix 1. Without their generosity in both communicating beforehand to organise the visits and engaging with me whilst I was visiting, this Fellowship would not have been possible.

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International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

I would like to thank and acknowledge the ISS Institute for the amazing opportunity to carry out this Fellowship. I have learnt an enormous amount that will impact on my career for many years to come.

The ISS Institute exists to foster an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia by cultivating the mastery and knowledge of talented Australians through international research Fellowships.

The International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute) is proud of its heritage. The organisation was founded over 25 years ago by Sir James Gobbo AC CVO QC, former Governor of Victoria, to encourage investment in the development of Australia's specialised skills. Its international Fellowship program supports a large number of Australians and international leaders across a broad cross-section of industries to undertake applied research that will benefit economic development through vocational training, industry innovation and advancement. To date, over 350 Australian and international Fellows have undertaken Fellowships facilitated through ISS Institute. The program encourages mutual and shared learning, leadership and communities of practice.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our individual Fellows. Under the International Applied Research Fellowship Program the Fellows travel overseas and upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

- » Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions
- » Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses
- » Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

The organisation plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice. By working with others, ISS Institute invests in individuals who wish to create an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia through innovation, mastery and knowledge cultivation.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

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8. Appendix - Summary of Programs Visited

City	Program/ University	Person visited	Person's role	Focus of program/visit discussion
Los Angeles	UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) – Center X	Karen Quartz	Director of Research & Communications - UCLA's Center X, Director of Research & Development - UCLA Community School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Community education » Research focus » Research – practice partnerships » Undocumented immigrant students » Education justice » Student teacher placement to support school » Supporting public education
Los Angeles	KIPP LA	Nicole Gutierrez	High School Placement Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Charter Schools » Strong 'to and through college' focus » School to college transition » High expectations for all young people » Working in low SES areas » Mentoring and ongoing support to enable positive college retention
		Lani Webb	College Access Overview	
		Lupe Cruz	College Persistence	
Los Angeles	School on Wheels	Denice Gonzalez-Kim	Partnership & Project Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Homelessness education support and interventions » Mentoring » Tutoring » Supplying school supplies

City	Program/ University	Person visited	Person's role	Focus of program/visit discussion
Boston	Boston Adult Technical Academy (BATA)	Benjamin Helfat	Headmaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Alternative schooling » Ages nineteen to twenty-one » At risk youth » Completing Year 12 equivalent » Pathways focus » Undocumented immigrant students
Boston - Cambridge	Harvard School of Education – Education Redesign Lab	Daniel Scarver	Program Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Rural achievement gap » Achievement gap – link to lack of after school activities
		Lynne Sacks	Associate Director of Programs and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Research – practice partnerships in six US cities » Higher level policy focus
Chicago - Evanston	City of Evanston Youth and Young Adult Division	Kevin L. Brown plus team of seven staff	Community Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Justice focus - diversionary programs, » Ages sixteen to twenty-four » At risk youth » Youth in gangs » Education outreach & case management » Summer programs

City	Program/ University	Person visited	Person's role	Focus of program/visit discussion
Chicago - Evanston	Youth Job Centre	Karen Demorest	Executive Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Partnership – philanthropy and local youth services » Focus on employment » College not for everyone
	Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance	Matthew Bruce	Executive Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Community College important option – ‘stackable’ credit » Re-engagement ‘hubs’ » Challenge of recording student pathways for reporting » Job placement importance » Working with employers important
Chicago - Evanston	James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy	Patrick Keenan-Devlin	Executive Director/ Staff Attorney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Youth justice » Representing youth up to twenty-two » Enabling pathways back to education » Impact of record on education and employment applications » Social justice/restorative justice » Police/ youth dialogue » Race and justice
Pittsburgh	Harvard Graduate School of Education Project Zero Perspectives Conference	Various		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pedagogy – applied learning » ‘Maker Movement’ » Thinking Routines » Enabling opportunities for students to wonder, think, ponder, question, and create » Thinking outside the box » Progressive education approaches

City	Program/ University	Person visited	Person's role	Focus of program/visit discussion
New York	Columbia University - College Research Centre	Elisabeth Barnett	Senior Research Associate at Teachers College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Community College – very low completion rates (around 18%) » Focus on remedial teaching » Students need better guided pathways into college » Now less electives » More determined courses offered » Thinking now – how to teach 'Grit' to students' (academic mindsets) » Online resources key
New York	Harlem Children's Zone	Jazmine Lewis	Director, Promise Academy I Charter School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 95 blocks of Harlem, amazing results » Strong offering 0-25.
		Janet-Marie Lopez	Assistant Director, Practitioners Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Highly supported transition » Families supported plus students » Students prepare for college from Year 9 onwards » Financial aid » College Success Office and Post Graduate institution help HCZ grads » Students engage with civic issues such as Black Lives Matters with guidance of HCZ staff



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